

## Some Glimpses of the English of Geoffrey Chaucer

By Keinosuke KAJI

When reading the works of Chaucer, the word *that* is very frequently noticed to exist as well as not to exist where its existence is looked on as utterly unnecessary and even redundant while its non-existence is accepted as quite reasonable and grammatically correct according to the modern usage of English. It is because of the great frequency in Chaucer's works of this word in such a redundant use that I make bold to refer to the more frequent non-existence of the word as much as its existence, which alone makes us more regardful of the suppression of this word which could not else be an object of inquiry for us. We will begin with our researches into the ways that the word *that* in such uses as are regarded obsolete and redundant in present day English, makes its frequent appearance or is suppressed as often as not, throughout the works of Chaucer.

It is the conjunction *whan* that is often followed by *that* and rather oftener unaccompanied by it. One of the examples where at once *whan* accompanied by *that* and *whan* unaccompanied by *that* appear in the same sentence can be found in the first ten lines of the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales, where one clause contains *whan that*, the other suppressing *that*.

*Whan that* Aprille with his shoures sote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour ;  
*Whan* Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne  
And smale fowles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the night with open ye.—The Prologue, 11.1—10.

It is worth notice that in case of *whan*, both forms, viz., *whan* with *that* and *whan* without *that* are far commoner than is the case with other conjunctions, interrogatives, prepositions, etc. When *whan* is followed by *that* there are two cases discriminated, in one of which it is used in the capacity of a conjunction as is shown in the above example and in the other of which it is used with the function of an interrogative as in the example quoted below :

*Whan that* thou toke my lady swete? —The Book of the Duchesse,  
1.483.

But *whan* as the interrogative is more apt to do without *that* after it like the following example :

Allas ! *whan* shul my bones been at reste? —The Pardoner's Tale,  
1.405.

*Whan* as the conjunction, on the other hand, is followed by *that* approximately as often as it is not followed by it, so far as the poetical works of Chaucer are concerned. For instance, in the Prologue *whan* followed by *that* is used nine times, that is, in the lines, 1, 18, 30, 266, 637, 697, 760, 801, and 822, while the uses of *whan* not followed by *that* amount to the same number. In the Clerkes tale, the former *whan* can be found in the six examples and the latter can be counted up to eight, which shows us that there is, if any, little difference of frequency between the two uses of *whan* in the verses. But it is not so with the works in prose. In his prose works, for example, in the Tale of Melibeus the latter *whan* can be counted as many as fifty two in the sections 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 20, 24, 25, 27, 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 46, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 60, 62, 63, 67, 70, 71, 72, 77, 78, while the former one can be counted no more than ten. It is not only interesting but worthy of notice that so far as is concerned with Chaucer's prose the latter has the overwhelming advantage over the former, to which I will take occasion to refer later on.

The abovesited sources of the examples contain an example of special interest such as found in the Prologue, 1.711 :

.....*whan* that song was songe.....

where *that* is a demonstrative adjective put after *whan* merely so as

to qualify the following noun *song* and not what we may call the postpositive *that* now in hand and consequently it is self-evident that this *whan* is nothing else but *whan without that*. The importance of this example, we should say, lies not so much in that this *that* is not a conjunction but an adjective as in that *whan* is no longer followed by *that* if it is followed by *that* in other function than that of the conjunction.

As already mentioned, *whan* is less frequently followed by *that*, when it is used by way of interrogative, be it dependent or independent, than is followed by *that*. In the *Canterbury tales*, for example, interrogative *whan* is almost always unaccompanied by *that* and used as what may be called independent *whan* and, on the contrary, conjunctive *whan* is very often followed by *that* and used as what may be called dependent *whan*. And moreover, in these tales *whan* unaccompanied by *that* and used independently is in most cases found to be conjunctive *whan* and not interrogative one. In the Prologue no interrogative *whan* can be found, and in the *Pardoner's Tale* too, we have a single interrogative *whan*, and so is it in the prose of the *Tale of Melibeus*. The scarcity of interrogative *whan* in the rest of the works too, strikes us as strange, so that it leads me to conclude that as much as 90% of *whan* can be inferred to be conjunctive without going astray so widely from the truth.

The *if that* clause is second to the *whan that* clause in its frequency in the works of Chaucer, poetical and prose.

.....*if that* I shal not lye.—The Prologue, 1.763.

By Chaucer the conjunction *if* is used to express the same three shades of meaning as implied by the same word in Mod. E. ;

Concession : *If that* I speke after my fantasye.—The Wife of Bath's Prologue, 1.190,

Alternation : *If that* she were as stedfast as bifore.—The Clerkes Tale, 1.733,

Condition : And *if that* I to hir be founde untrewed.....—The Parlement of Foules, 1.428,

and it is confirmed by these examples that the uses of this conjunction are similar to those in Mod. E. Meanwhile, the compound form of

*if*, e. g., *if that* is as frequently found in the works of this poet ;

And *if* ye finde no trewer man than me. —A Compleint to his Lady,

1.120.

But as for frequency there is no noticeable difference found between the compound *if that* and the single *if* so far as the verses of Chaucer are concerned ; the ground of which conclusion is afforded by the fact that the former instances are counted 3 in the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe, the latter ones 6, while the former examples number 10 and the latter 4 in the Prologue. This fluctuation of the number of the examples in the two uses of the conjunction makes it impossible for us to decide which of them is commoner than the other. But once we pass to prose the balance turns markedly in favour of the former instances and decidedly against the latter ones because the former number as many as 46 and the latter only 2. The same inclination as that of *whan* is again felt to be prevalent in this conjunction, though within the same narrow limits of prose.

It is not unfrequent that the interrogative adverb *how* is dependent upon *that* following close after it.

*How that* the pope. as for his peples reste,

Bad him to wedde another.....—The Clerkes Tale, 11.741—742.

Although in many examples *how* is found alone in a clause without being followed by the appended *that*, slight difference can be recognized in comparison with the aforesaid conjunctions *whan* and *if*, for in this case the compound form of *how that* seems somewhat more prevalent than the single form *how* in so far as the examples of this kind are sought for in the verses alone. In the Pardoner's Tale only the former can be found but no single case of the latter can be found as is the case with the Prologue either. But this can not hold good in the prose of this writer, where the compound form is constantly adhered to throughout the Tale of Melibeus, the sections of which (15, 27, 41, 50, 53, 54, 67, and 101) abound in the single *how*, the only exception being found in § 62. Apart from prose the reason why the compound form is preferred to the single form in the poems can be presumably attributed to the fact that the conjunctive force of the word *how* was not so great as that of *whan* or *if* and naturally it was

regarded less as a conjunction than as an interrogative adverb in the age of Chaucer so that the addition of *that* must have been considered as a suitable support to consolidate the conjunctive force of *how*, especially in the poems. When *how* is followed by *that*, now and then adverbs or adjectives split *how* and *that* as follows :

*How* merily *that* other fôlkes faie.—The tale of the wyf of Bathe,  
1.330,

the splitting of *how* and *that* often occurs in *what that* which shall be mentioned afterwards.

The expression *er that*.....is found often to appear in the English of Chaucer, the structure of which seems rather consistent than otherwise, seeing that the first element of the compound was originally an adverb.

But she was deed, *er that* I coude hir finde.—The Complaynte unto Pite, 1.35.

.....his heed was of, *er that* he wiste.—The Monkes Tale, 1.568.

Together with the above use, the single form *er* with *that* unattached to it is also as much used by the author.

*Er* she with childe was.—The Clerkes Tale, 1.555.

But it is noteworthy that with careful investigation the compound form turns out to be a little commoner than the single form *er* whether in prose or poetry, contrary to what has been said as to *whan* or *if*. Seeking examples in Melibeus, both forms are found only once, which makes a keen contrast to the uses of *whan* and *if*. We can take it for granted that though the conjunctive use of *er* can be found in OE., this word from which *er* is derived must have been felt as an adverb or a preposition more intensely than as a conjunction and was as yet in the course of development into an independent conjunction such as the conjunction *before* in Mod. E. during the author's lifetime, so that consciously or unconsciously he was apt to add *that* to *er* even in his prose writings. Naturally it was not till the conjunction *before* became common in English usage that *er* dropped its appendage *that* felt at present quite unnecessary from the stand-point of Mod. E. usage. When the author lived and wrote, it may be concluded that the use of the single conjunction *er* had taken only a few steps towards the

establishment of the modern use of *before*.

The phrase conjunction *whyl that* is an expression to be found here and there throughout the whole works.

.....*whyl that* ien is hoot, men sholden smyte.....—The Tale of Melibeus, § 12.

Though in this expression *that* is sometimes done without, yet *whyl* followed by *that* is far commoner than the single *whyl* and that in both prose and poetry. Even in the Tale of Melibeus where the latter use may well be expected often to appear, the fact is that while the former use can sometimes occur, the latter cannot be found at all. Although the Prologue has an instance of the latter, the Pardoneres Tale has two examples of the former but only one of the latter. If we proceed to think of the cause of this unusual inclination, it is simply this; that, historically speaking *whyl* is changed from *hwil* in OE. and in OE. *hwil* is not a conjunction but a noun and moreover, ME. developed another use, that is, the conjunctive use, in addition to the old use but the former use had not been established so firmly as to rid the compound of the second word and the consequence is that in both prose and poetry of Chaucer *whyl that* is profusely used and *whyl* is sparsely used not merely in the poetry but in the prose of Chaucer. Otherwise, *whyl that* would be less in poetry and more in prose as it is in both as is the case with *whan* and *if*. In short, it can be said with more or less truth that the time of Chaucer falls on the stage of development of this word from the noun to the conjunction. As for the use of *whyl* and *whyl that*, there is one thing more worth mentioning. It is that whenever these conjunctions are used they are simple conjunctions expressive of time as shown by the examples in the Prologue, 1.397, the Clerkes Tale, 1.769, the Pardoneres Tale, 1.180, do., 1.220, the Tale of Melibeus, § 12, do., § 20, etc., but the transfigurative use of these conjunctions expressive of concession or contrariety can scarcely be come across in the whole works. To those who are accustomed to this use of Mod. E. this seems strange at first sight but on second thought it seems anything but unnatural that when the single conjunction *whyl* is so unstable as to be surpassed by *whyl that* the simpler use of time is the general rule while the adversative

or concessive use of more delicacy is the exception in the works of Chaucer for the change from the simple to the complicated is the natural order of development with almost everything.

With *thogh* (or *al-thogh*) the case is thoroughly different.

*Thogh that* I pleynly speke in this matere.—The Prologue, 1.729.

*Al-though (that)* she hir clothes solde.—The Romaunt of the Rose  
(Fragment A), 1.452.

*Though* he were gentil born, and fresh and gay and goodly for to seen,  
and humble and free.—The Squieres Tale, 11.614—615.

*Although* it be not worth a botel hey.—The Manciple's Prologue, 1.14.

When, after the OE. *peah* having established its conjunctive use, the conjunction *thogh* of ON. origin took its place in Early ME. the way had been already paved for its conjunctive use and therefore there ought to have been no more need for any support to help its conjunctive force. Though not lacking in the compound form, *thogh that*, it is the single conjunction *thogh* that the works of Chaucer abound in as can be easily supposed. What the OE. *peah* did to the ME. *thogh* can be seen in this preference of *thogh that* to *thogh*. Concerning the frequency of the former and the latter, the latter is incomparably commoner than the former. Besides the example of *al-though that* quoted above, only one more can be found in the Hous of Fame, 1.621 and except in these two examples, *al-though* is sure to be unaccompanied by *that*. Even in the above-mentioned example from the Romaunt of the Rose, 1.452, the conjunction *that* was not added by the author himself but the editor, so as to increase one syllable of the line and make it octosyllabic. The reason why *al-thogh* is not followed by *that* when *thogh* is in many instances accompanied by it may be partly that *al-thogh*, being composed of *al* and *thogh*, is the emphatic form of *thogh* and, having already two syllables itself, will have three by adding *that* and then this conjunction will come to be felt too ponderous and clumsy for ordinary use and chiefly that in spite of the fact that the first part of the compound conjunction is, etymologically speaking, the same as *al* in such words as *already*, *always*, and *albeit*, yet *al* in ME. has also the function of a conjunction and thereby, the conjunctive force of *al-thogh* is already considerably

strong so that the addition of *that* to it is felt to be dispensable. Whether this assumption of ours holds good or not, there can be no doubt that in the works of Chaucer *al-thogh* is inclined to do without *that* in most cases.

The compound conjunction *al-be-it* is invariably accompanied by *that* in prose and poetry.

.....*Al-be-itt that* cursedly and dampnably we han agilt agayn your  
heigh lordshipe.—The Tale of Melibeus, § 73.

*Al-be-it* that I can not sounne his style.—The Squieres Tale, 1.105.

But another kind of example more usual and of tenger to be met with throughout Chaucer's writings is such a one as follows :

*Al-be-it so that* every sinne is agayns the holy goost.—The Peisones  
Tale, § 30, 411.

In this phrase conjunction *so* splits *al-be-it* and *that*. In either case the reason the compound conjunction *al-be-it* accompanies *that* without exception can be ascribed to the fact that this compound consists of three words, e. g., *al*, *be*, and *it* so that it is primarily nothing but an adverbial clause expressive of concession.

We have another conjunction, quite similar in structure to the above-mentioned, that is, *al be* as quoted below ;

But *al be that* he was a philosopre.—The Prologue, 1.297.

*Al be* I not the firste that dide amis.—Troilus and Criseyde, I, 1.1069.

In the former of these examples, *al be that* seems to us to compose a compact unit of meaning as a whole and be felt as if it were a single conjunction, while in the latter example, both *al* and *be* seem to be separate units of meaning and make a clause instead of a compound word by being put together. For example, in the former to treat *al be that* as though it were *thogh* makes no difference in its meaning by any means and on the contrary, in the latter instance to replace *al be* with *thogh* is to make this clause grammatically imperfect because by doing so this clause comes to lack the verb *be* in it and thus the change will not be for the better owing to its formal imperfection. To quote another instance,

*Al be* his woundes never so depe and wyde.—The Squieres Tale, 1.155.

In this example what has just been said holds good, too.



Next come *who that* and what may be called its variations, e. g., *whatso that, whom that, whos that*, etc.

*Who that* ther come.—Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1.1115.

*Who-so that* troweth nat this, a best he is.—The Seconde Nonnes Tale,  
1.288.

Of *whom that* speketh Virgilius.—The Hous of Fame, 1.1244.

.....*whos child that* it was—The Clerkes Tale, 1.538.

It is a matter of course that we have another corresponding group of examples where *that* is suppressed or unexpressed. Regarding the above examples what we have to say is that somehow or other the compound expression *who that* is so rarely used that the above example is all that we have. On the whole, in the writings of Chaucer *who* or *who that* is mostly used in independent or dependent questions as the interrogative pronoun but as the relative pronoun it gives place to *that* or *which that* as a rule.

*which that* can be applied to both persons and things, the former use of which is shown by the following examples :

To the erl of Panik *which that* hadde the

Wedded his suster.—The Clerkes Tale, 11.708—709.

The markis, *which that* shoop and knew al this.—do., 1.890.

In either of these examples the antecedent of the relative is a noun. At the same time there are many instances found where *which that* stands connected with the antecedent of a thing instead of a person as exemplified in the instance below ;

.....in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,

*which that* he seyde was sure lady veyl.—The Prologue, 11. 694—695.

Also there is often the simplified form with *that* suppressed as follows :

.....bifore folk to *which* his speche anoyeth.—The Tale of Melibeus,  
§ 12.

In connection with this it is of significance that the simple relative *which* is less commonly used by Chaucer than the compound form *which that*, for even in the prose of Melibeus the former use occurs in no more than 2 or 3 cases while the latter appears in more than 8 instances.

The relative or interrogative adverbs *wher that* and its variations,

*wher as that* and *wherfor that* have also their corresponding forms without *that*.

*Wher that* we goon.—The wife of Bath's Prologue, 1.322.

*Wher* is now al your wommanly pitee? —The Complaynte to his Lady,  
1.107.

These examples show us that *wher* or *wher that* is used both in interrogative clauses (dependent or independent) and in adverbial clauses. And moreover, it must be noted that the compound form with *that* is more usual than the simple form without *that*. To take the example of *wher as*, the compound form can be found in the Freres Tale, 1.343 :

*Wher as that* somnours han hir heritage

but we find it pretty difficult to seek another instance and on the other hand, the simple form can be seen with ease and in abundance in many works such as the Tale of the Man of Lawe, 1. 549, do., 1. 1033, the Pardoner's Tale, 1. 138 and the Manciple's Prologue, 1. 49.

There is no great difference of frequency recognized between *why that* and *why*.

*Why that* I rente out of his book a leef.—The wife of Bath's Prologue,  
1.667.

*Why* lyketh yow to do me al this wo.....? —A Complant to his  
Lady, 1.65.

So that, it is quite impossible to decide which use is commoner. *Why that* is found to be used at once in the dependent clause in the above example and in the independent clause such as the following :

And *why that* ye ben clothed thus in blak? —The Knights Tale, 1.53.

*What* is used in the various functions of the relative or interrogative pronoun, and relative or interrogative adjective with or without *that* after it.

Relative Pron. : And therfor herkneth *what that* .I shal seye.—The  
Prologue to Melibeus, 1.47.

Inter. Ad. : And eek in *what* array *that* they were inne.—The  
Prologue, 1.41.

Inter. Pron. : *what that* he wolde answer. The Tale of Melibeus,

do.                *what* have I doon that greveth yow or sayd..... ?

—A Complaint To his Lady, 1.66.

As in the second example in the use of the relative adjective of *what* a noun is apt to be put between *what* and *that* and thus the splitting of *what that* by, a noun takes place.

*What* man *that* is norissed by fortune.—The Tale of Melibeus, § 42.

In the use of the relative adjective the compound form takes place in the works of Chaucer far oftener than the simple form.

Regarding *for that* in the example below,

.....*for that* he

Wende that I hadde of him so greet chieetee

—The wife of Bath's Prologue, 11.395—396,

when we are reminded that the word *for* is a preposition and not a conjunction in OE. it is quite natural for us to infer that in ME. the compound form must be in greater use than the simple form but careful investigation disproves this inference of ours. On inquiry, the following use of this conjunction,

.....*for* I ne can nat finde

A man.....—The Pardoner's Tale, 11.393—394,

proves to be incomparably greater than the other. This inclination, in particular, is more striking in prose than poetry, for in the prose tale of Melibeus alone the examples of this simplified form amount to more than 110 while the compound form can hardly be found in it.

It may be that we have not a single instance of so great preponderance of the simplified form over the compound one in the matter of what we call redundant *that*. This leads us to conclude that in the time of Chaucer the conjunctive use of this word by itself had already been established in spite of the fact that we have a few examples of the *for that* use. There remains one thing more to be added to the effect that established as the conjunctive use of *for* is in Chaucer's English, yet many examples convince us that the modern use of the co-ordinate conjunction *for* is not established yet there and the conjunction *for* in it can be regarded as equivalent to the conjunction *because* in Mod. English with greater propriety.

*Sith* (or *sithen*) *that* and *sin that* both are sometimes found to dis-

pense with the additional *that*.

.....*sith that* it bigan. The Cleikes Tale, 1.850.

*Sith* ech of hem recovered hath his make.—The Parlement of the Foules,  
1.688.

.....*sin that* the world was newe.—The Tale of the Wyf of Bathe,  
1.388.

.....*sin* I knowe your delyt.—do., 1.361.

Notwithstanding the words *sith* or *sithen* and *sin* are derived from *sið ðan* mainly used as adverbs and rarely used as conjunctions in OE. these conjunctions have a slight propensity towards the dispensation of the postpositive *that* in prose as well as in poetry.

As for the conjunction *but-if* too,

.....*but-if that* he and she

Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.—The wife of Bath's Prologue,  
11.93—94,

*But-if* she outhur saugh or herde

Some greet mischaunce, or greet disece.—The Romaunt of the Rose,  
11.250—251,

there are two uses such as the above but the latter use, e. g., *but-if* without *that* can be said to have a somewhat greater frequency than the former on the ground that whereas the former use occurs rather rarely in Chaucer's works, with its few examples in the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe, 11. 150—151, and the Seconde Nonnes Tale, 1.447 in addition to the abovementioned, the latter use is too profusely found to be quoted; some of which use being found in the Tale of Melibeus, § 23, 24, 31, 33, 50, the Reeve's Prologue, 1.17, the Reves Tale, 1.39, Tale of the Man of Lawe, 1.538, the Romaunt of the Rose, 11.250—251, etc. As is concluded from the above it is especially in prose that the additional *that* is prone to be suppressed.

Throughout the whole works *til* and *til that* can be found everywhere.

*Til that* he be adawed verrailly.—The Marchauntes Tale, 1.684.

*Til* he cam into Brugges merily.—The Shipman's Tale, 1.64.

*Til* is somewhat superior in frequency to *til that* in prose while the latter surpasses the former in verse to some extent. This can be more or less explained by the consideration that in OE. *til* is a mere

preposition and its conjunctive use is unknown there. The examples show us that the conjunctive use of *til* and *til that* is almost always limited to that of the same preposition in the dialects of OE. except the Northern Dialects and used in reference to time.

As for *whether* there occur two forms, e. g., *whether that* and *whether* but the latter is slightly commoner than the former.

For *whether that* he payde or took by taille.

Algate he wayted so in his achat,

That he was ay biforn and in good stat.—The Prologue, 11.570—573.

But who so wol assaye him-selve

*whether* his herte can have pite

Of any sorwe, lat him see me.—The Book of the Duchesse, 574—576.

As in Mod. E. *whether* clause has two uses, that is, noun and adverbial.

It is worthy of remark that the conjunction *bi-cause* of which there can be found no single example in OE. makes its first appearance in ME. and nevertheless the following use ;

*By-cause That* the cradel by it stood ; —The Reves Tale, 1.304,

where *that* clause stands appositive to the preceding noun *cause* occurs almost as frequently as the simplified use without *that* such as

*By-cause* he was of carpenteres craft ; —the Reeve's Prologue, 1.8,

and moreover.

*Bicause* the archer was so nere ; —the Romaunt of the Rose, 1.1818,

the above example proves that the conjunction takes a long stride towards the modern use of the same conjunction, though this example is found in the Romaunt of the Rose (Fragment B.) which is said to have been written by somebody else than Chaucer.

*Lest* too, has two uses in spite of its old conjunctive use since in OE.

*Lest* he may thinke that ye him eschuwe. —Troilus and Criseyde,

11.1.1255.

*Lest that* Criseyde, in rumour of this fare,

Sholde han ben slayn.—do., V, 11.53—54.

Both uses are almost equally in constant use in both prose and verse.

It is only natural that *after* is accompanied by *that* for the latter

is originally a preposition :

*After that* Dame Prudence hadde spoken in this manere.—The Tale of Melibeus, § 54.

.....*after that* they be dede.—The Parle.ment of Foules, 1.79.

The use of the conjunction *as* is worth special remark, for though this conjunction is the contracted form of the OE. adverb, *alswa*, its conjunctive use independent of the postpositive *that* is firmly established in the works of Chaucer.

.....*as* I left at hoom al my clothing.—The Clerkes Tale, 1.655.

The examples of this kind are too numerous to quote but the compound form with *that* is very scarce ;

.....*as that* I fele.—A Complot to his lady, 1.61.

What is said about this conjunction can be applied to *as thogh* in

*As thogh* he were his owene yborne brother ; —the Pardoner's Tale, 1.704,

and to *as long as* in

*As longe tyme as* it is Goddes wille.—do., 1.726,

and to *right as* in

.....*right as* they hadde cast his deeth bifoore

Right so they han hym slayn.—The Pardoner's Tale, 11.880—881.

On the other hand such phrase conjunctions as *as fer as*, *as wel as soon as* and *for-as-much as* take as often the postpositive *that* and this shows us that the English of Chaucer has many things left to later development at least so far as the above phrases go.

Though only in a few instances, we have such a combination as follows ;

That no man sholde knowe of his entente,

Ne when nehe cam, no *whider that* he wente.—The Clerkes 11. 587—

588.

As this usage is rather rare in Chaucer, so much for this collocation.

Last comes the use of *that* in the examples below ;

*The more that* I love yow, .....

The lasse finde that ye loven me.—The Complot to his Lady,

11.104—105.

.....*the richer that* he is, the gretter dispenses moste he make.....

—The Tale of Melibeus, § 53.

In this construction *that* is sure to follow the comparative in the preceding clause.

As is shown in the examples already quoted, when *that* precedes various words, firstly it plays the part of an aid to strengthen the conjunctive force of such words as *er*, *til*, *sith*, *for*, etc., each of them being originally or mainly a preposition or an adverb; secondly it follows such interrogatives as *who*, *wher*, *whan*, *how* and *why*, all of them being interrogatives in origin; thirdly it accompanies such words as are properly conjunctions including *but-if*, *thogh*, *whyl*, *whether* and *if*; fourthly it is added to some phrase conjunctions, *al be*, *al-be-it*, *by-cause*, *as*.....*as*, *for-as-much as*, etc. with a view to consolidating their conjunctive function.

Though more or less conjunctive force is added by the postpositive *that* in the cases last mentioned, to wit, those of such phrase conjunctions as *by-cause that*, *al-be-it-that*, etc., yet generally speaking the addition of this word seems to us to be of formal or morphological significance rather than of grammatical or functional necessity. This view of the matter is justified by the fact that save in a few exceptional instances the use of the postpositive *that* is far greater in poetry than in prose. It is especially in poetry that the addition or suppression of *that* matters much, for if the poet is free to add or omit it as he pleases, thereby he is given a great facility in arranging the number of accents as is best to him. That in the works of Chaucer the postpositive *that* has a striking propensity to be treated as a metrical facility rather than as a grammatical necessity can be deemed as one of the stepping-stones to the almost total omission of *that* in Mod. E.